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ABSTRACT

A. C. Snider has suggested that CEDA (Cross Examination Debate Association) should create an outreach program to connect CEDA debate programs with the high school policy debate community. Most debate educators would laud programs that promise to train more students in argumentation, but a pilot program shows that an outreach program does not fulfill its promise of open debate to more students. A study set up a pilot program at Marist College (New York) that: (1) assigned two unpaid student interns to administer the pilot program; (2) assessed the needs of high school debate programs; (3) set up a high school judging program that provided judges for high school debate tournaments; (4) ran a model LD workshop for high school debate; and (5) attempted to recruit high school students to the college to join the debate team. These various projects met with a broad range of outcomes from not worthwhile to very worthwhile. However, experience demonstrates that active outreach to high school students drains resources from more pressing needs. The college administration supported this pilot study; but when they evaluated the results, the academic vice president wondered if time and money would not be better spent introducing new college students to debate rather than chasing after experienced high school debaters. He did not see why high school students who already had 3 or 4 years of debate training would be intrinsically more worthy of attention than college students with no experience. (TB)

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reaching out: extending the argument about debate outreach

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A.C. Snider (1994a) has suggested CEDA should create an outreach program to connect CEDA debate programs with the high school policy debate community. While most debate educators would laud programs that promise to train more students in argumentation, we will argue that outreach will not fulfill its promise and open debate to more students. Snider (1994a) noted that Marist College had, what he then considered to be, the outreach program "most advanced for the 1993-94 school year" (p. 30). We learned from the Marist pilot program that outreach damages a small active debate program by distracting it from its primary mission—training its students in argumentation and winning tournaments. Below we overview outreach, describe and evaluate the Marist pilot outreach program, and conclude with a discussion of how outreach squanders small college resources.

OVERVIEW

Snider (1994a, 1994b) wants CEDA programs to run workshops, host tournaments, make themselves visible in local high school debate communities, colonize CEDA at colleges without debate, and do whatever else necessary to connect CEDA with active NFL (National Forensic League) policy debate programs in order to earn the high schoolers' respect and to broaden CEDA's appeal. All of this sounds great. As communication educators, debate coaches like to see more talk about debate. At small colleges, however, we have limited resources with which to share the good news. Marist is a tuition driven school. Most CEDA schools are tuition driven. Most CEDA programs run with one coach, or with a coach and an assistant. On any given weekend most CEDA programs find the size of their travel squad governed by how many teams and how much evidence can

squeeze into a fifteen passenger van. One coach, even with a reduced teaching load, can work with only so many students, hear only so many practice rounds, and travel to only one tournament in any given week. Directors of debate need to ask two questions about outreach before they commit to an outreach program designed to introduce their debate program to a broader high school community. First, does outreach serve the needs of their college? To what degree do their students, as opposed to their career or their high school clients, benefit from outreach? Second, is outreach merely a rhetorical strategy designed to cover the transfer of resources from curricular programs for matriculated students to an aggressive recruiting program designed to bring seasoned high school debaters to CEDA? As much as coaches would like to deny the fact, the opportunity for tournament travel remains a relatively zero sum proposition on most squads. Given finite debate travel budgets, debate teams that outreach successfully will travel squads largely composed of ex-high school debaters, not debaters recruited from campus communication classes. Given finite resources, a debate program committed to outreach would seemingly abandon the goal of introducing college students with little debate experience to debate. Outreach signals a change in CEDA's character and mission.

THE MARIST EXPERIENCE

We bracketed these questions about budgets and our program's mission in order to create a pilot program to test Snider's proposal.¹ Our outreach program consisted in four parts: an administrative model, a "needs assessment" of the local high school debate community, a service program for the local high school community, and a recruiting program designed to complement the college's marketing strategy.

ADMINISTRATION: We worked with the assumption that head debate coaches have little free time to devote to additional responsibilities. Teaching, coaching, college committee work, professional development, research and publication adequately tax the time of most coaches. In order to model what we considered a workable administrative structure, and in order to gauge realistically the people needs created by an active outreach effort we created an assistant coach line to administer outreach.² The debate budget would not support hiring an assistant coach, so we filled the position with two unpaid student interns.³ The interns received academic credit for their labor. The interns directed day to day administration, drafted workshop curricula, conducted the needs assessment, directed the service program, recruited high school prospects, and acted like real assistant coaches by hearing practice rounds, working with research, and doing much of the team's usual bureaucratic paperwork. After a semester in which the interns found themselves spending whole days chasing after high school people, we concluded that the labor an active outreach program may spend on outreach knows no natural limit. High school clients willingly use all available time. Further, recruiting knows no natural limits. A head coach who runs a "one person shop" will discover that an ambitious outreach program prevents her or him from fulfilling existing responsibilities.

We sharply curtailed outreach after concluding the pilot study because without interns the program suffered from an administrative vacuum. College spending priorities do not support filling the assistant coach line. No current debaters are in an academic position to elect an internship. Duties can not be distributed among debate squad members because travel, classes, on-campus jobs, and debate research consume all of their

time. Once we move from demonstration to implementation, we learned that in a small college setting if we aspire to create a competitive debate squad, we lack the people resources to outreach effectively at the same time. Outreach differs sufficiently from squad building as to make the two activities relatively exclusive.

NEEDS ASSESSMENT: We worked with the assumption that we should ask our prospective clients what they wanted from a debate outreach program. We asked both high school coaches and high school debaters what they wanted from a college debate outreach program. We first conducted an informal survey of high school coaches at the Hendrick Hudson debate tournament in December 1993. From our conversations with coaches we learned three things:

1. Judging—local high schools desperately need debate judges virtually every weekend October through April. A shortage of judges and a shortage of money with which to pay judges function as the primary limits to greater student participation at most high school debate tournaments.

2. Workshops—programs that we could classify as “competitive” or “most successful” expressed little or no interest in anyone running CEDA debate workshops during or immediately prior to the high school debate season. Most debaters from competitive programs already attend summer debate camps. The coaches at competitive programs perceive themselves as being, and are, qualified to train their students without much, if any, outside assistance. If the coaches at competitive programs desire anything, they want college student assistants who can travel, cut cards, listen to practice rounds, and

talk debate with their kids. The most successful programs find that their alumni and the college friends of their alumni more than adequately fill these roles.

Programs that we would classify as "less competitive" and those programs that emphasize LD would welcome CEDA workshops. Students from less competitive programs tend not to attend summer workshops. Many of these students can not afford workshops and scholarships help far too few attend workshops. Coaches want free workshops that can break down some of the class bias in debate. Coaches do not use the words "class bias" when they discuss the workshop problem. Coaches convey the sense, however, they recognize how debate's structures discriminate against the less affluent. Coaches would like to see new workshops bridge some of this structural gap. Coaches from less competitive programs would like workshops devoted to basics: clash, evidence, reasoning, and topic analysis. Coaches also would like someone to run workshops devoted to training parents how to judge debate.

3. New programs—all coaches would welcome efforts to colonize new high school debate programs. Most coaches fear high school debate is dying.

In April 1994 we conducted the second part of the needs assessment by surveying participants at the New York State Championships about their attitudes toward debate. Students qualify for New York States hence our survey population reflects the attitudes of those whom the New York debate community would define as being successful. We distributed survey instruments to all LD and Policy debaters at the beginning of Round 2 and we collected the instruments at the end of the round. One hundred seventy-four students returned surveys. Forty percent of the respondents were women. We did not

survey for ethnicity. Sixty-seven percent of the respondents were freshmen or sophomores. The most significant finding was that 43% of policy and LD debaters contemplated quitting the activity. Given that 67% of the respondents were freshmen or sophomores we surmise that most who contemplate quitting do quit before graduation. Fifty-four percent of respondents believe that debate needs radical changes. A plurality of students believe that high school debate needs more responsible judging, narrower topics, a reduced research burden, better topic selection, and more efficient tournament administration. Workshops played a significant role in how people thought about debate and in who felt competitive. The average policy debater who had attended a workshop spent \$2869 and the average LD debater who attended a workshop spent \$1411. Eighty percent of all students who had not attended summer workshops would like to attend a workshop. We did not ask students if they were priced out of summer workshops.⁴ In response to open-ended questions, students asked nothing in particular of us.

We conducted the survey at the end of the high school debate season. Through the course of the season we regularly had worked with many of the debaters in our survey population; we judged many at a number of tournaments and we had taught some at a workshop. Some of the high school debaters got to know us quite well, and would ask us how our outreach program was going and talk with us about what we were doing. Read in context with these informal conversations, we interpreted our survey as telling us high school debaters would like to see the activity loosed from some of its hierarchy.

SERVICE PROGRAM: We planned three projects and undertook two of them. The most successful project was our proactive high school judging program. In order to

simplify the process of finding judges for local high schools, the outreach coordinator created a judge inventory containing names, social security numbers, phone numbers, debate experience, conflicts, and information on who owned cars. The outreach coordinator then contacted local high school coaches, obtained a tournament calendar, and worked with the coaches to find enough of our people to meet their needs. We successfully placed judges at all of the major local tournaments. We placed fifteen judges at New York States. We convinced people that CEDA debaters can judge policy debate; seven of the nine judges in novice, junior and varsity finals at States were judges from our list. We have continued and expanded this portion of our outreach effort. Our debaters like the money. The debaters learn from judging.

Another successful project was the model LD workshop that we developed for a group of Buffalo/Rochester CFL (Catholic Forensic League) schools. The model workshop ran for one Saturday and focused primarily on how to improve "clash" and the use of evidence in LD debate. Coaches and debaters attended the same workshop sessions. We ran a demonstration debate and conducted several seminar sessions. Catherine Luhr, the coach at Mt. Mercy Academy in Buffalo handled local arrangements (site reservation, refreshments, publicity) while we handled curriculum. This division of labor proved successful. The client assembled the participants and described its needs; we responded to the need. We charged no fees for workshop participants. This year we have limited our workshops to local schools (Dutchess County only) without active debate squads. Anything more ambitious would prove to taxing on our people resources.

We had planned on running a high school tournament to fill out our menu of outreach services. Given the success of our college tournament, we knew we could run a tournament on time, efficiently, and provide a healthy competitive environment. We discovered, however, that we could not find an open date on the local high school calendar that did not conflict with our travel schedule. We also discovered the forty-eight rooms we reserve for our college tournament are not available to us on most weekends. On most of the so called "open" weekends in the high school tournament calendar, our campus hosts tests like the LSAT or it runs adult education programs, continuing education seminars, or some other profit-making venture. We also concluded that the economics made little sense. Unlike many debate programs, when we host events, we must pick up the overtime costs incurred by housekeeping and security. The college will not absorb overtime into its overhead. This means that unless we charge fees upwards of \$75 per team, we commit to losing \$1500 on an event. We do not mind losing \$1500 on our own tournament, because that represents what we would spend to travel to a tournament on the same weekend, but we question the value to our program of subsidizing a high school tournament out of our travel budget.

RECRUITING: The final part of our outreach effort was the recruiting program. We sold the program to the administration by promising to expose the college to academically talented high school students. The Marist people who judged and who ran workshops collected names of potential students. We also developed lists of prospects from admissions office data. The outreach coordinator developed a direct mail program that targeted groups drawn from these lists. Of the 110 prospects targeted in our final mailing,

96 attended the college. On face, that would seem good. In practice, we could accommodate only 30 of these 96 in debate class, and we can accommodate only around 8 on the debate team.³

THE DANGER OF OUTREACH

Our experience demonstrates that given sufficient resources, outreach can improve the quality of high school debate and can sell high schoolers on the worth of an individual college debate program. Resources, however, are scarce. Active outreach drains resources from more pressing needs. Our administration supported the idea of our pilot study; but when we evaluated our results, our AVP (Academic Vice President) wondered if we could better spend our resources introducing new Marist students to debate rather than chasing after experienced high school debaters. He did not see why we would consider students who already had three or four years of debate training as intrinsically more worthy of our attention than students with no experience. He also believed that the talented high school debater with a little initiative could learn about college opportunities through many channels—the absence of outreach will not prevent the most interested from finding us. Our college's admissions brochures, for example, advertise our debate program. The point that Snider (1994a) makes about high school debaters knowing little about opportunities simply may mean that the high schoolers have not tried very hard to learn about college debate. From the standpoint of a college with finite resources there is no rationale for outreaching off campus if one can do as much to broaden debate by devoting time to expanded on campus programs.

Outreach also will damage comity in the debate community. After hearing about our debate workshop, a number of Rochester area schools wondered why Rochester had not run a workshop. Rochester ran a workshop this year. We never intended to damage Rochester's image among local schools—we do not believe we could damage its image by running one workshop—but the episode revealed to us the risk posed by outreach. Richer programs can "beggar their neighbors" by shaming them into outreach. One of the reasons the NCAA restricts athletic recruiting is to prevent richer schools from bankrupting poorer schools in recruiting wars. Poorer programs should not have to run workshops and saturate state debate tournaments with judges in order to remain competitive. If outreach channels successful high school debaters into those CEDA programs that outreach, as Snider (1994a) proposes, then smaller poorer CEDA programs will have no choice but to outreach in order to remain competitive. Outreach is but another name for recruiting.

We should try to keep a place in college where we can teach argumentation to people without high school debate experience. Outreach makes that place a little smaller. Outreach can bridge the distance between CEDA and high school debate. The outreach bridge may be one we should choose not to build.

WORKS CITED

- Snider, Alfred C. "Exploring the Undiscovered Country: Creating Networks Between High School and College Forensic Programs." *The Forensic* 79.2 (Winter 1994): 28-30.
- . "CEDA Colleague." 27 November 1994.

NOTES

¹ We had no ethical qualms about bracketing these questions because a number of one-time opportunities allowed us to defer these issues. We staffed outreach with two student

interns. We neither taxed coach time nor the debate budget. Further, because we promised to test the recruiting impacts of outreach, the admissions office agreed to support outreach overhead expenses during the pilot study.

² We modeled this position on the "recruiting coordinator" position generally found in most NCAA division I football programs. In most programs, the recruiting coordinator handles all communication between the college and high school community.

³ Pam Clinton assumed primary responsibility for coordinating the program as part of a 12 credit internship. James Hocking, the 1993-94 debate team captain, worked as a 3 credit intern. He assisted with workshops and he tabulated needs assessment data.

⁴ The survey results should be considered very preliminary. The debate topic may affect student satisfaction. We have no baseline satisfaction measure from which to generalize. At this point we intend one or more follow-up surveys in order to develop a richer data base and in order to fine tune the survey instrument.

⁵ Local car rental firms carry only twelve passenger vans. Eight debaters, one coach, and evidence fill a twelve passenger van. Students under 21 can not drive rental vans. Hence, our practical travel limit on any given weekend is eight. When we begin to assume two or three tubs of evidence per team, our travel squad drops to six.